of style for authors, editors and copywriters, published by the University of Chicago Press, 12th ed., 1969. The thirty-two pages which relate to indexes have also been separately published. The guidance given covers all aspects of the subject and is comprehensive. This publication is widely used as the authoritative guide to good book production and serves as a guide to the best practice. For the practising indexer this is a more practical and useful publication than the American National Standards Institute Z39.4-1968 Basic criteria for indexes, largely because it gives more examples to illustrate the recommendations. In this respect, the Chicago Manual of style is similar to the English BS 3700.

To sum up, on the whole the 'official' guides give little, or no, guidance as to compilation of indexes, being concerned more with the lay-out and printing aspects. Good indexes are an important part of every publication except some pure literature forms, fiction and very small pamphlets published by a government, and by the world-embracing organizations such as Unesco and similar bodies and the organizations proliferating with their assistance, no less than those issued by commercial publishers. What use is a publication if one cannot find out what is in it by means of an index—and find it quickly without reading much of the text in one’s search? All government style manuals need to have incorporated in them, a practical guide to compiling indexes, unless a satisfactory one is published in the country and is recommended for guidance by all indexers—and it can be incorporated with the author’s agreement. The existing 'standards' and the books referred to in this article are recommendations or guides to indexing and not complete manuals. It is not suggested that the guidance given on indexing in a government style manual should be anything more comprehensive than these. They will not give the answer to every problem that will arise in indexing—this is where the knowledge and experience of professional indexers is so important. But the inclusion of guidance, as suggested, in government style manuals should help to better indexing of government publications. The professional indexer may be essential for long and complicated texts or when special subject knowledge is required; it may be convenient, economical and in other ways an advantage to use his services.

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Correspondence

The Editor
The Indexer
Sir,

Mr Geoffrey Hamilton’s otherwise admirable article, ‘How to recognise a good Index’, seems to me mistaken in assuming that a ‘good’ index is necessarily synonymous with one suitable for presentation to the Wheatley selection committee. But many excellent indexes are no more of a kind to compete for this medal than a cookery book for the Nobel prize. In particular, his first observation that the length of an index should be at least five per cent of the text cannot be accepted as a general rule. Many books provide material for only two or three per cent but would be the poorer without indexes.

May I, as a relative novice to indexing but an ancient user of indexes, suggest that indexes could more often help the general reader to tackle scholarly or specialised works if they included references for technical, foreign or unusual words. A location reference to the first appearance or definition of a word can be invaluable. And it can sometimes be useful to compile a combined ‘Index and Glossary’.

Yours truly,
Michael Gordon
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Mr Hamilton’s comments on points made by Mr Michael Gordon are as follows:

Mr Gordon has taken two points in my article further than they were meant to go. I did not intend to suggest that every ‘good’ index is necessarily a potential Wheatley Medal winner. To receive that accolade an index has to have some characteristics which make it in addition an outstanding one. The suggestion, for which I claim no originality, that an index should amount to at least five per cent of the length of the text indexed was so hedged round with qualifications that I hoped it would be clear it was not put forward as a universally applicable rule. Nonetheless it is a useful rule of thumb so long as it is not used as the sole arbiter of what constitutes a ‘good’ index.